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Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-sixth session
27 February-9 March 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by International Council of Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

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Statement

We are pleased to submit this statement from the International Council of Women, a global umbrella non-governmental organization (NGO) representing millions of women worldwide in over 60 member countries.

We applaud the decision of the Commission to focus on the empowerment of rural women as the main agenda item at the fifty-sixth session of the Commission. In many of our member countries women provide the skills, labour and dedication to assure a safe food supply. Despite their efforts, often in circumstances of dire hardship, the livelihoods of many rural women are becoming uncertain. Many are fearful of the future. With rising populations and changes in crop yields and harvest patterns due in part to the impacts of climate change, a depressed global economy and civil strife, rural women are struggling to maintain their productivity. The challenges are great, varying in different regions of the world from devastating natural disasters to problems of land rights and widows' rights to inheritance.

We urge the Commission to make recommendations at this session, which will frame strong action to support rural women by:

(a) Providing the infrastructure — transport and communications — for speedy access to markets;

(b) Ensuring that women farmers have adequate facilities in rural centres for the sale of their produce;

(c) Establishing gender sensitive credit schemes for women farmers to enable them to increase their productivity;

(d) Recognizing and acknowledging the critical importance of their efforts to overcome poverty and eradicate malnutrition.

The International Council of Women, in supporting initiatives to empower rural women, urges Governments to work with village communities to revise customary law and abolish harmful practices affecting women and girls, to enable them to enjoy equality, the right to own property, including land, and to have full access to education and training.

Our Development Project Fund has continually added value to women's agricultural production through the provision of livestock, village water tanks and educational resources and training in literacy, human rights, budgeting, marketing and strategic planning. At our recent meetings, the role of women as food producers and change-makers on climate, defending the integrity of the planet, has been high on the agenda. Action by NGOs, especially women's NGOs like the International Council of Women, to conserve energy, plant trees, preserve local soil resources and carry out education at the local level for a carbon-free environment will be pivotal to the future health and well-being of the global community. In developing a toolkit for community education the International Council of Women is leading the way towards a sustainable environment. Rural women, as essential food producers, are central to a sustainable economy.

Work on sustainability was at the heart of the International Council of Women triennial theme 2003-2006, with its focus on women in sustainable development: poverty eradication, water and the girl child. In November 2011, in preparation for the fifty-sixth session of the Commission, the International Council of Women's

Asia-Pacific Regional Council Seminar and Training Workshop in Nadi, Fiji, had as its theme "Women in agriculture: building a sustainable future". Women's contribution to a sustainable global economy as change-makers and entrepreneurs was linked to attaining the Millennium Development Goals. The Training Workshop was called "Women, food security and health". Outcomes and recommendations have provided a firm new threshold for the delivery of strategies to mitigate the effects of climate change, enhance regional food security and improve overall health status and nutrition at the community level.

At these meetings of the International Council of Women, women were challenged and empowered.

Women farmers provide essential food production in every region, but they face critical challenges. For many, their access to land for grazing and cultivation is uncertain. Increasing population growth in many countries and the recent rise in the cost of food means it will be necessary to increase worldwide food production between 70 and 100 per cent by mid-century. In this environment the ability of rural women to increase their production will be the key to the provision of a continuing adequate food supply. Visionary outcomes from the fifty-sixth session of the Commission will do much to ensure that rural women are able to play their part in bridging the gap between food production and food consumption, which threatens future generations. Please be assured that the International Council of Women, through its affiliated national councils and representation at the United Nations, will be working to carry forward these outcomes.